

## TheMHS Service & Program Award

Tandem is proud to be the trusted voice of family carers and supporters (also known as mental health carers) in mental health in Victoria. As the Victorian peak body with a sole focus on the needs and interests of this cohort, Tandem's role is to provide leadership, coordination and knowledge for the organisations and individuals who are working to improve outcomes for Victorian people living with mental health challenges. Tandem is committed to ensuring that the importance of the contribution, expertise, experiences and needs of family, friends and other carers is recognised and addressed, and that they will be essential partners in treatment, service delivery, planning, research and evaluation. Tandem is a member of Mental Health Australia as well as the Victorian representative organisation of the national peak body Mental Health Carers Australia.

*All entries must use TheMHS entry template and enter information in the relevant sections to be eligible for entry.*

- *Additional Information about Entry (1 x A4 page). Please expand upon the brief description given in Part A.*

- *Address the following Criteria (max. 10 X A4 pages).*

### **1. Evidence of a significant contribution to the field of mental health on a local, state or national level.**

Tandem is a not-for-profit Victorian Peak Agency currently employing 20.7 FTE. It is funded by the Victorian State Government and recently received an increase in core funding of over 600%. This increase was influenced by the final report of the Victorian Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in which Tandem was accredited with a significant role throughout the Commission's inquiry, including supporting families and carers who took part in the Commission's focus groups and facilitating meetings between its members and Commissioners.

Further the Commissioners envisaged a substantial role for Tandem in a future mental health and wellbeing system that is more responsive to and inclusive of families, carers and supporters. In keeping with the aspiration for 'effective leadership and accountability for the mental health and wellbeing system—new system-level governance', the Commissioners also recommended that the Department of Health continue to fund Tandem to fulfil functions such as advocacy and participation in engagement activities run by government agencies.

Since the release of the final report Tandem has received a boost to core funding which has enabled it to expand its reach, influence and workforce. This increased horsepower will ensure that Tandem is uniquely positioned to prosecute the case for reforms recommended by the Commission.

#### **Tandem:**

- **Provides systemic and non-legal advocacy, support with system navigation and referral and the NDIS via the [Tandem Support and Referral Line](#) on 1800 314 325**

Tandem has experienced significant growth of the Support & Referral service, with the assistance of the project funding received from DHHS. Recognising the need to respond to the increased demand of both the Advocacy and NDIS support and referral services and the need to support this growth with integrity, compassion and appropriate governance, Tandem has advocated and worked towards

identifying the growing need for a unique and tailored direct support and referral service to complement its strong systemic advocacy of families and friends in mental health.

Tandem's support and referral services provide a tailored approach that has the expertise of Peer Advocates who understand and acknowledge the carer/family members role in supporting the person they care for and the barriers that carers/family members can face in accessing information and support. We are committed to providing families and friends in mental health with both systemic advocacy and direct support pathways which have not been available to them but are recognised within the Mental Health Act Principles (Mental Health Act 2014 (s 11), the Carer Recognition Act, the Victorian Carer strategy 2018 -22- Recognizing and Supporting Victoria's carers and the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist guidelines for Working with Families & Carers.

*'Thank you so much for all your help, you really do make things easier and more bearable for us in these difficult times. You are a real charm. Thank you again. You have been a blessing in all of this trauma.'*

Over the course of the pandemic Tandem experienced a significant uptick in demand for support and services, snapshot below:

Type	Percentage increase June 2020 to June 2021
Total inbound calls	766 %
No of new contacts	432%
No of re-engaged contacts	1687%

- **Administers the Carer Support Fund over the last five years the numbers of family/supporters were assisted is summarised below:**
  - Since 2018/19 we processed 3427 applications climbing to 5508 in 2021, representing a 60 % increase

The Mental Health Carer Support Fund is funded by the Victorian Government and administered by Tandem, for the benefit of people in a caring relationship with a person who is receiving services from one of the Victorian Area Mental Health Services. All applications are made through and are approved by the Area Mental Health Services who forward applications to Tandem for processing.

The Mental Health Carer Support Fund provides funding to assist people in their support role, to promote and sustain the relationship, and improve the wellbeing of families and members of the community performing this role.

Who is eligible?

Family, carers and supporters of people receiving services from an Area Mental Health Service (AMHS) are eligible to receive money through the Carer Support Fund. Tandem encourage clinicians, managers and lived experience workforce personnel at Area Mental Health Services to ensure that families and carers are aware of this avenue of support for them in their caring role.

- **Auspices CLEW – Carer Lived Experience Workforce**
  - This arrangement formalised by a Memorandum of Understanding
  - Reciprocal relationship dating back to 2014

- Tandem provides an auspice for the CLEW in order to administer funding to support the CLEW and any other activity that requires the involvement of an incorporated organisation
- Katrina Clarke Chair of the CLEW also sits on the Tandem Board of Management

In addition to this outward facing work with the CLEW, we have created new workforce roles that:

- Enable family, carer, and supporter perspectives to support and guide workforce initiatives associated with Royal Commission recommendations
- Strengthen the relationship between the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division and Tandem to support workforce reform initiatives from the Royal Commissions interim and final reports
- Provide capability and capacity to Tandem which supports the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division of the Department of Health to work collaboratively with family, carer lived experience workers

Tandem has also developed a project proposal with the CLEW re the development of the lived and living experience workforce which has been endorsed by the Department of Health. Implementation of this project will commence in the new financial year.

- **Administers the Tandem Register, join at: <https://tandemcarers.org.au/Web/Policy/Join-the-Tandem-Participation-Register.aspx>**

The Tandem Participation Register is a pool of inducted and supported mental health family carers and supporters from across Victoria from a range of ages, family roles and experience and backgrounds. There are currently 202 members on the Register, and this is continuing to grow, we saw a 112% increase in membership from 2021-2022.

Tandem supported over 194 members to attend over 50 engagements in the 2021-2022 financial year and we have noted an increase in complexity of those requests. There is always a variety of requests that come to the Register, and we have primarily supported the Victorian Department of Health but also other state and Commonwealth stakeholders to engage our members for Advisory groups, codesign workshops, consultations and focus groups.

**Tandem is a member of:**

- The Lived Experience Advisory Group reporting to the Mental Health Ministerial Advisory Group alongside VMIAC
- The Mental Health Ministerial Advisory Group
- The Interdisciplinary Clinical Advisory Group
- State, National and stakeholder expert, technical advisory & steering groups
- Victorian Mental Health Policy Network
- Women's Health Alliance
- Mental Health Australia
- Mental Health Carers Australia – unfunded national peak

Please see the Annual Reports [2020-21](#) and [2019-20](#) for further information and a full list of our partners.

Tandem as the trusted voice of family, carers and supporters has long advocated for reform at the state and national level on behalf of its members and people living with mental health challenges.

Numerous policy submissions have been made across a range of critical issues independently and in partnership with our sector allies.

Please see the [Tandem website](#) for a full list of Victorian and Commonwealth policy submissions and responses.

Tandem works closely in partnership with VMIAC – the Victorian Consumer Peak Agency and has co-chaired the Lived Experience Advisory Group with VMIAC and Executive Director of the Mental Health Branch of The Department of Health in Victoria since 2018. Tandem has strong working relationships with a range of agencies for the full list please see our latest Annual Report.

## **2. Evidence of innovation and/or recognised best practice.**

Tandem's advocacy throughout the process of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System clearly demonstrated the trust and reach it has in the community. Attached please find a letter from Penny Armytage Chair of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System as evidence of Tandem's significant and invaluable contribution.

Nearly 300 members including family, carers and supporters and mental health staff attended Tandem meetings with Commissioners.

Tandem supported 14 of the 70 RCMHS online focus groups meaning that 20% were tailored for family, carers and supporters.

'Consumers, family, carer and supporter inclusion will also be a routine aspect of the commissioning of mental health and wellbeing services, and of workforce development and training.' P.4

'As the peak body, and in light of the Commission's recommendations to increase family and carer involvement, the Commission envisages a substantial role for Tandem in a future mental health and wellbeing system that is more responsive to and inclusive of families, carers and supporters'

'new system-level governance outlines the Commission's expectation that the Department of Health will continue to fund Tandem to fulfil functions such as advocacy and participation in engagement activities run by government agencies'. p.57 Chap 27

Recommendations 30, 31 and 32 specifically address the needs identified for family, friends and supporters, summarised as follows:

- Recommendation 30: Developing system-wide involvement of family members and carers
- Recommendation 31: Supporting families, carers and supporters
- Recommendation 32: Supporting young carers

## **3. Evidence of participation of mental health consumers in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of mental health service delivery. Evidence of prioritising increased level of engagement and influence of consumers and where higher-level participation such as authentic co-design is highly favoured. There may be exceptions to the involvement of mental health consumers. Some entries may reasonably explain any circumstances where the involvement of mental health consumers is different or limited.**

In Victoria we are moving to a model of partnership between Lived Experience which is defined as people with lived experience identify either as someone who is living with (or has lived with) mental illness or psychological distress, or someone who is caring for or otherwise supporting (or has cared for or otherwise supported) a person who is living with (or has lived with) mental illness or

psychological distress. People with lived experience are sometimes referred to as 'consumers' or 'carers'. The Commission acknowledges that the experiences of consumers and carers are different.

This means that Tandem as the Victorian peak for family carers and supporters works alongside VMIAC the consumer peak, services and government to bring about systemic change in partnership.

'The Commission makes a number of recommendations to elevate the experiences, expertise and perspectives of consumers, families, carers and supporters, so that together, they are at the centre of the mental health and wellbeing system's governance and leadership structures.' 19.8 p.94

#### **4. Evidence of Partnerships and Linkages with all key stakeholders (collaboration for continuity between organisations).**

Tandem routinely works in partnership in its role as a peak and engages across the community to ensure that the voice of family, carers and supporters across the community particularly from marginalised and culturally diverse communities is present in all our work. Through our management of the participation register we have built on the strong foundation built during the consultation phase of the Royal Commission where we worked closely with agencies such as VACCHO, Drummond Street Queerspace, VTMH, Foundation House, Women's Alliance and Mental Health Victoria to name a few key partners, to ensure that opportunities to engage in the implementation of reform underway is promoted and people are supported to participate.

Tandem is unique in that we have both individual and organisational members who are committed to working in partnership to ensure that we are able to work towards a mental health and wellbeing system that moves from an individualistic, punitive model to a relational healing approach. A system that routinely takes a whole of person, whole of family and whole of life approach.

#### **5. Verification and evaluation of the program's effectiveness e.g., quality improvement activity, data collection and its use including graphs and tables, achievement of performance indicators, e.g., attendance figures, outcome measures, number of document downloads, page views, click through rates.**

Tandem has experienced strong growth across all of our channels in the 14 months from the end of March 2021 to the end of May 2022:

- eNews subscribers increased by 41%
- Social media followers increased by 48%
- Website visitors increased by 40%

Breaking that down further:

##### **For eNews:**

Our eNews open rate has also increased over that period, from an average of 26% to an average of 32% - our email open rate is now higher than the non-profit industry average of 30.5%

45% of our audience is considered 'highly engaged' and often open and click our emails

##### **For social media:**

- Facebook followers grew by 42%
- Twitter followers grew by 40%

- Instagram followers grew by 275%
- LinkedIn followers grew by 193%

We have reaped the benefits of our increasing social media presence. 70% of the family and friends who participated in recent focus groups for the Family and Carer-led Centres project were not members at the time that they signed up, with the vast majority of these people finding out about the focus groups through Facebook or Instagram

**For the website:**

- Tandem launched a new website in June 2021
- Visits to the CSF page have increased by 755%
- Visits to the 'Join' page have increased by 92%

*Judges allocate marks to each criterion.*

- *Conclusion (1/2 x A4 page).*

Tandem has been operating as a peak in its own right since 2014 and in this short time has transformed the inclusion of family, carers and supporters. It has seen a shift in inclusion from something based on the interest and kindness of individual service staff across the clinical and community sectors to ensuring the experience of family, carers and supporters is regarded as 'core business' for services.

The Tandem CEO sits on the Mental Health Ministerial Advisory Committee and co-chairs the Lived Experience Advisory Group alongside the CEO of VMIAC. The Tandem Board Chair sits on the Interdisciplinary Clinical Advisory Group (ICAG). Both the CEO and Chair have regular monthly meetings with the state Minister for Mental Health, the Hon. James Merlino MP who welcomes frank and open discourse about reform activities and their impact on family, carers and supporters.

Tandem has a key role in reform of the mental health and wellbeing system in partnership with the consumer peak VMIAC and other key peaks such as VACCHO and Mental Health Victoria. The power imbalance that has previously truncated any culture change has been called out and Tandem and VMIAC are now able to engage in reform with other peaks, government and services going forward as equal partners at a table being built in partnership.



**Royal Commission into  
Victoria's Mental Health System**

Ms Marie Piu  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tandem  
Level 1, 37 Mollison Street  
ABBOTSFORD VIC 3067

*Marie*  
Dear Ms Piu

I wanted to take the opportunity as the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System concludes its work to formally thank you for your contributions.

I was sorry to hear that the end of the Commission comes at such a difficult time for you personally. My thoughts are with you as you progress with your treatment.

The support you have provided, and that of the Tandem staff and members, has been invaluable to the Commission.

Your personal commitment to improving the experiences of families, carers and supporters, and the people they care for, has been clear, and the evidence Tandem provided to the Commission has been very useful to our deliberations.

I am particularly grateful for the peer support Tandem provided which helped many carers to participate in the Commission's consultations and focus groups. Your facilitation of contact with family members and carers also helped the Commission to hear from a diverse range of individuals about their needs and experiences, and their ideas for improvements to the mental health system.

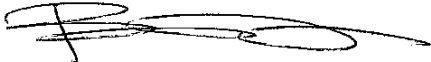
On behalf of my fellow Commissioners, Dr Alex Cockram, Professor Bernadette McSherry, Professor Allan Fels AO and I, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to you for this effort.

I also want to acknowledge the additional challenges that were presented by the coronavirus pandemic and your generosity in continuing to support engagements in these circumstances. You have made a very substantial contribution.

The Commission delivered its Final Report to the Governor of Victoria on 3 February 2021. It sets an ambitious blueprint for transforming Victoria's mental health services, and the design of central and foundational elements of a future mental health system. Once the report had been tabled in Parliament by the Victorian Government it will be made available on the Commission's website at [www.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.rcvmhs.vic.gov.au).

I hope you will be proud of your contributions to this important work. Your contribution has formed part of a significant reform plan to improve our mental health system, to benefit many Victorians now and into the future.

Yours sincerely



**Penny Armytage AM**  
Chair

